NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6233 OCTOBER 31, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

PAKISTAN: THE GREAT DEBATE

ANNCR:

IN PAKISTAN, THE EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE ISLAMIC LAWS AND THOUGHTS PERMEATE ALL AREAS OF LIFE HAVE PROVOKED DEBATE ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THAT NATION. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE DRIVE FOR ISLAMIZATION HAS BEEN SPEARHEADED BY THE MULLAHS, THE ORTHODOX MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO FORMED ONE OF THE STRONGEST ELEMENTS WITHIN THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE, THE GROUPING OF POLITICAL PARTIES THAT FOUGHT FORMER PRIME MINISTER ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO. BEFORE HIS OUSTER IN A MILITARY COUP IN JULY, 1977, MISTER BHUTTO SOUGHT TO APPEASE THE MULLAHS GIVING IN TO THEIR DEMAND FOR PROHIBITION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AND GAMBLING.

SINCE HIS OUSTER, THE MULLAHS HAVE FOUND AN ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER OF ISLAMIZATION IN GENERAL MOHAMMED ZIA UL HAQ, THE MILITARY LEADER WHO DEPOSED MISTER BHUTTO. GENERAL ZIA, A DEVOUT MUSLIM, HAS HEAVILY WEIGHTED HIS NEW CIVILIAN CABINET WITH CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS DEDICATED TO SPEEDING THE PACE OF ISLAMIZATION. SINCE THE NEW CABINET TOOK OVER IN SEPTEMBER, SWEEPING REFORMS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED IN SUCH AREAS AS EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT TO INSURE A GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE TEACHING OF ISLAM. A DECREE IS EXPECTED SHORTLY THAT WILL MAKE SHARIAT LAW AS CONTAINED IN THE HOLY KORAN THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND. GENERAL ZIA HAS SAID HE HOPES TO FORMALLY ESTABLISH THE MUSLIM CHARACTER OF THE NATION BEFORE HE TURNS OVER POWER TO AN ELECTED CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT SOME TIME NEXT YEAR.

BEHIND THIS MOVE TOWARD ISLAMIZATION, IS A DEEP DESIRE IN THE PART OF DEVOUT MUSLIMS TO KEEP OUT MODERN AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES THEY SINCERELY BELIEVE ARE EVIL AND CORRUPTING. WHILE MILLIONS OF PAKISTANIS, PROBABLY THE GREAT MAJORITY, NO DOUBT SHARE THIS FEAR, THERE ALSO ARE A GREAT MANY WHO DO NOT. MANY WESTERN-EDUCATED MODERN PAKISTANIS COMPLAIN THAT THE MULLAHS ARE TRYING TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK TO THE DARK AGES.

RECENTLY, THE WESTERN-ORIENTED PAKISTANIS HAVE FOUND A CHAMPION IN AN OUTSPOKEN FORMER GOVERNOR OF BALUCHISTAN PROVINCE, GHAUS BAKHSA BIZENJO. MISTER BIZENJO, RECENTLY RELEASED AFTER THREE YEARS IN PRISON, STUNNED THE NATION LAST MONTH BY DECLARING THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A PAKISTAN IDEOLOGY. HE SAID THAT ISLAM IS A UNIVERSAL FAITH, BUT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A MUSLIM NATION ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. MISTER BIZENJO ALSO HAS BEEN CALLING FOR GREATER REGIONAL AUTONOMY. HE ARGUES THAT PAKISTAN HAS COMPRISED FOUR DISTINCT NATIONALITIES -- PUNJABI, SINDHI, BALUCH AND PATHAN. HE COMPLAINS THAT THE MORE NUMEROUS AND WEALTHIER PUNJABIS ATTEMPT TO DOMINATE AND EXPLOIT THE OTHER NATIONALITIES.

PROPONENTS OF ISLAMIZATION AND THE UNITARY STATE CONCEPT, ON THE OTHER HAND, WARN THAT GREATER AUTONOMY COULD LEAD TO PAKISTAN'S DISINTEGRATION. THEY SAY ISLAMIZATION COULD SUPPLY THE GLUE TO HOLD THE NATION TOGETHER IN THE FACE OF THE FORCES TENDING TO DIVIDE IT.

THIS PAST WEEKEND, MISTER BIZENJO'S NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY THREW DOWN THE GAUNTLET BY CALLING FOR A MORATORIUM ON CHANGE UNTIL THE NATION HAS AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

GH/PY